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Trying to Seize Power in Afghanistan

was a rumor that Daoud had taken refuge in the French embassy compound.

What triggered the coup was unclear last night. However, on Wednesday, the government radio announced that seven Communist politicians had been arrested following an antigovernment demonstration several days earlier.

They had led some 15,000 people in

a funeral procession bearing the body of Communist leader Mir Akbar Khabir, who was killed April 17, past the U.S. embassy, denouncing the Central Intelligence Agency.

Khabir was the leader of the Khalq, (Masses) Communist faction. One of yesterday's broadcasts said that the coup had been carried out "in the name of the masses."

As far as could be determined, the head of the Afghan armed forces, Gen. Haider Rasuli, who was also Daoud's defense minister, remained loyal to the president throughout the fighting. His fate was not yet known.

The outburst came as a surprise to U.S. diplomats, who believed that Rasuli was in complete control of the armed forces, largely armed and trained by the Soviet Union over the years. The State Department also believed, as one department source put it, "that Daoud had his act together."

However, the anti-Communist government of Iran's Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi has been warning for some time that the Soviet Union was agitating for a way to remove the neutralist Daoud. Iran has long feared that a pro-Communist government in Afghanistan could lead to tribal unrest on the Afghan-Iranian frontier.

Pakistan's fundamentalist Moslem government would also be expected to be upset by any move toward Moscow by Kabul. Afghanistan and Pakistan have long been embroiled in a border dispute.

The Soviet Union has a long history of intrigue and deep involvement in Afghanistan. In czarist days, the Russians played what Rudyard Kipling referred to in "Kim" as "The Great Game," struggling with Britain for influence in Afghanistan. The Russians' goal was to win control of an overland route to a warm-water port on the Arabian Sea coast.

Even before Daoud came to power, Afghanistan had successfully played off the Soviet Union against the United States. At times swaying closer to Moscow and at times seemingly moving toward Washington, the Afghans managed to squeeze maximum economic assistance from the two superpowers.

U.S. Ambassador Theodore Elliot reportedly called on all Americans in Kabul to remain indoors during the fighting. No casualties among resident Americans have been reported. Kabul airport was reportedly closed and a curfew imposed on the city.

Former vice president Nelson Rocke-

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By Milton Clipper—The Washington Post

feller, his wife, Happy, and a party of nine were spending the night at the Pakistani frontier town of Peshawar, adjacent to the fabled Khyber Pass leading into Afghanistan. The Rockefellers, who dined Tuesday night with Pakistani leader Gen. Zia ul Haq, were supposed to travel through the pass to Kabul today.

Washington Post correspondent Bernard D. Nossiter in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and special correspondent William Branigan in Tehran contributed to this article.